

# Neighborhood Workbook

## Section Five: Holding a Good Meeting

# 5



Tell me, I forget. Show me, I remember.  
Involve me, I understand.  
*--Chinese Proverb*

### What all good meetings have in common:

- Advance Preparation
- An agenda
- A leader with a positive attitude
- An agreed upon starting and ending time
- The right people present (ALL stakeholders)
- Adequate information
- Clear decisions made, with next steps identified

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### Who are stakeholders?

- Residents (property owners and renters)
- School officials
- Religious institutions
- Community groups
- Business representatives

## Holding Successful Meetings

Apply these preparation steps to all public meetings. These steps usually will be carried out by the Planning Team with assistance from the City's Planning Department if your association decides to work with the planning Department and if is successfully selected through the application process:

The planning team duties:

- **Agenda.** Set an agenda for each meeting that will keep the group on schedule with the proposed work plan. (*see appendix 5 for a sample agenda*)
- **Time.** Determine how much time will be needed for the meeting. Your meetings can be held on a weekend or in the evening depending on your participants' schedules. If you hold your meeting on a weekend, allot several hours. If you schedule an evening workshop, you may need to allot less time.

Choose a meeting time that is convenient for the majority of participants. If you anticipate or desire the participation of the elderly, who often times like to be home before dark, schedule your workshop during the day. This is also a good time for businesses. On the other hand, evening or weekend hours are best for participants who work or attend school. You also may want to provide childcare facilities so that working parents in your neighborhood have the opportunity to participate. It is important to try to involve all sections of your community thereby establishing a foundation for trust.

- **Location.** Deciding where to hold the meeting is just as important as planning what items will be covered. The location of the meeting can determine whether or not it is a success. With this in mind, use the following criteria when selecting a meeting location:

1. Choose a place that provides adequate parking, well-known, accessible to the disabled and wheelchair dependent, and near public transportation. In general a place everyone can feel comfortable.

2. Choose a facility that is large enough to accommodate all planned activities, including dividing participants into work groups (this activity is described later in this section).

3. Try to find a place that has or can provide some, if not all, of the necessary equipment (i.e. easels, tables, and chairs) so that the amount of equipment brought to the site can be reduced. Places that tend to work well include schools, churches, colleges and libraries.

- **Take care of the logistics.** This step includes double-checking on the availability of the meeting location, arranging seats, equipment, and tables before participants arrive, providing sufficient copies of handouts, etc. An important detail that is too often forgotten is the sound system, many times in large meetings a sound system is necessary. You also should double-check with work group facilitators to make sure they know where to go and what time to arrive. Make certain that work group facilitators and recorders are clear about their roles and responsibilities. A facilitator's guide and responsibility listing is provided on page 5 – 6 of this section.
- **Spread the word.** Publicize the meeting everywhere. When neighbors see upcoming meetings advertised in a variety of ways and a variety of places, a favorable public opinion is formed about the meeting and the group. Most neighborhood organizations rely heavily on media attention to promote their area and the activities it undertakes. To publicize your public meeting, notify neighborhood residents, business people, and property owners by invitation in the form of a hand delivered flyer or a mail-out letter. Keep in mind flyers may not be put into mailboxes. You also should utilize your local media by sending a meeting announcement to radio and television stations for airing as a public service announcement or by sending a news release to local newspapers especially the Express-News Sun (see *sidebar next page for guidelines*).

### Meeting Materials Checklist

- ☐ Easels with flip paper (1 per workgroup). Work groups will be discussed later in this section.
- ☐ Masking tape
- ☐ Markers (2 or more different colored per workgroup)
- ☐ Blank name tags
- ☐ Sign-in-sheets
- ☐ Dot stickers (2 different colors per workshop participant)
- ☐ Copies of workshop agenda
- ☐ Pens (keep them together with the nametags, sign-in-sheets, and workshop agendas on a table at the entrance to the workshop place)
- ☐ Food/drink (though this is optional, it helps attract people to the workshop)



In addition, these items are needed for specific meetings:

- ☐ Copies of Neighborhood Characteristics (basic demographics) handout See section 6 for more information on collecting demographic data.
- ☐ Copies of handout-sized map of the neighborhood area.
- ☐ Large map of the neighborhood area to mark up during work session (1 per workgroup)
- ☐ Large land use map of the neighborhood area



The San Antonio Express-News Neighbors sections welcome your stories, photos and other news items.

The Neighbors sections are a part of the Express-News each Wednesday. Deadline for news or editorial copy is noon Wednesday the week prior to publication. Six Sun newspapers are produced—Southside, Westside, Northwest, North Central, Northeast and Tri-County.

When sending news items, double spaced, typed press releases are preferred. If an item is handwritten, make sure the copy is clear and readable—especially names, dates and telephone numbers. Please include a contact name and phone number in case more information is needed. Remember to specify in which edition you wish your announcement to appear.

News releases should be mailed to the Express-News Neighbors, P.O. Box 2171, San Antonio, Texas 78297-2171. FAX items to 250-3305. For more information about submitting news items of other editorial copy, call 250-3345.

### Checklist – Did you contact:

- ☐ Local media (radio stations, Sun Newspaper)
- ☐ Area Churches (in church bulletins or announcements during sermons)
- ☐ Neighborhood Groups, Homeowners Associations (newsletters, announcements at meetings)
- ☐ Schools, PTA, Boosters (handout flyers to kids, announcement at school gathering)
- ☐ Area Business Associations (attend meeting, mail invite)
- ☐ Have a poster or leave several flyers at grocery stores, drug stores, public libraries and other places of meeting.
- ☐ Post on Community Bulletin boards on the Internet or the neighborhood homepage (See Appendix 13 for web address).

All announcements and news releases should contain the purpose of the meeting, date, place, and time, as well as the name and telephone number of a contact person. A sample meeting flyer and news release are included in appendix 6 of this workbook.

Make as much personal contact as possible in your neighborhood to encourage a good turn out at the meeting. This outreach includes following up about a week before the meeting with phone calls and/or correspondence. While personal follow-up can determine the success or failure of your meeting, it often is the most neglected step in meeting planning. Organizing a phone tree is a very effective outreach strategy. Phone trees involve one person calling another person and asking him or her to call someone else, and so on. Also, neighborhood volunteers can be recruited to organize the effort.

After your boundaries are established, a complete list of residents, businesses, commercial groups, schools, churches and property owners should be compiled. This list should be kept current throughout the planning process to allow everyone to become involved.

In order to get a complete list, you may need to go door-to-door. Also, property records are also available from the Bexar Appraisal District (BAD). Property searches can be conducted on the BAD's website. (See *Appendix 13 for web address*)



## Why Do We Need Breakout Groups?

Breakout groups are not needed at every meeting, only those where a large group is present and ideas need to be generated. The idea behind breaking into work groups is to separate couples and cliques, thereby evenly distributing thoughts and ideas. If all those present remain in one large group, the flow of ideas may be stifled by the group's size. If the collective group is very small, breaking into two groups may be unnecessary.

## How Do We Set Up Breakout Groups?

To divide the collective group into smaller breakout groups, have participants number off. For example, when there are 24 people at the workshop, have them count off from 1 to 2 (i.e. 1, 2, 1, 2, etc....) starting at a specific section of the room and working methodically row by row. Encourage couples or others attending the meeting together to split up. After they number off, ask all the 1's to break off into one breakout group with 12 people while the 2's break off into another. The Planning Department recommends that at least two groups be created. The Planning Department can help train those who are interested in being facilitators before your public meeting.

## How Do We Facilitate a Breakout Group?

To estimate the number of facilitators needed, take the number of people you expect to attend (usually about 10% or fewer of the total number invited, e.g. 100 out of 1,000) and divide it by 10. Between 8–12 people can participate in a successful small group. Each breakout group will require two facilitators, one to guide conversation and another to record ideas on the flip pad. Ideal facilitators are people who have an interest in the neighborhood but are able to put their interests aside and motivate others to share their thoughts and ideas.

### Other publicity resources include:



- Neighborhood association newsletters
- Weekly area newspapers (in Community Calendar section)
- Schools, churches, and club newsletters
- Door-to-door handouts
- Person-to-person by phone to friends and neighbors
- Bulletins, notices, pamphlets, posters, and fliers placed with permission in:
  1. Laundromats
  2. Libraries
  3. Supermarkets
  4. Local Restaurants
  5. Stores
  6. Waiting Rooms in medical offices
- Booths at local events
- Speakers at:
  1. Business groups
  2. Service groups
  3. Youth groups
  4. Schools and Churches
- Cooperative efforts with adjoining neighborhoods
- Letters
- Telephone trees
- Your neighborhood website

## GROUND RULES FOR DISCUSSION

**1. Be courteous.** Respectfully acknowledge the thoughts and ideas of others.

**2. Share your ideas.** If you have something important to say, speak up and let it be heard by all. The only bad idea is an unspoken idea. The ideas and opinions of everyone are equally important.

**3. Listen to others.** Be polite and do not interrupt. Everyone deserves a chance to speak and be heard.

**4. No Speeches.** One person dominating the discussion is not a good use of the short amount of time available.

## Group Facilitator's Functions:

### Facilitation Skills

As facilitator you should:

- Understand fully the objectives of the overall meeting.
- Organize your own ideas.
- Explain the objective of the total meeting as well as the relationship of the group task to the overall objective.
- Make certain that everyone understands the task.
- Keep the discussion on track.
- When conclusions, agreement, or major points have consensus, test them with the group. If the group agrees, have recorder write the point down.
- Point out aspects and ideas that are being neglected.
- Remember that you are not "selling" ideas, solutions, or approaches. You are merely there to encourage the expertise of the group.
- Help encourage openness. Help the group resolve conflict or at least understand the key issues involved in the conflict.
- Know your own biases and be prepared to handle contributions constructively that may violate them.
- Be on the alert for decision making before the problem is understood or all data has been surfaced.
- Encourage group discussions and consensus rather than letting the group use you as a referee.
  - Watch for two or more ideas being worked on simultaneously and help the group recognize the confusion, to identify the different points and work on them one at a time.
  - Be alert for repetition of ideas and call attention to what you see and ask for group confirmation.
- Attempt to help the group differentiate opinions from facts.
- Periodically help the group summarize where it is and has yet to go.
- Watch your time, end the discussion on time.
- Spend a few moments with the recorder after the workshop or meeting to be sure of the points to be recommended and the manner in which the recommendations will be made.

